NEWS

Winchester man lobbies for amendment to add recall mechanism to state constitution

NELL ESCOBAR COAKLEY | STAFF WRITER

October 28, 2025 . 6:00 AM — 5 min read

Winchester resident Michael Dattoli out gathering signatures for a state ballot initiative which would add a mechanism to allow Massachusetts residents to recall an elected state official. COURTESY PHOTO/MICHAEL DATTOLI

While Massachusetts communities have the ability to recall an e
official, thanks to their charters, the state itself has no such mechanism.

Subscribe

That means the governor, state legislators, district attorneys, sheriffs and county commissioners cannot be removed unless voters decide not to re-elect them.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, only 19 states and the District of Columbia have a provision for state recalls, among them California, Wisconsin and Rhode Island. That leaves 31 states, including the Bay State, without.

But one Winchester resident hopes to change that.

Michael Dattoli is in the process of gathering signatures for a ballot initiative that would implement a recall mechanism as an amendment to the state constitution. This is Dattoli's second try.

"Someone needs to take the next step and get this method into Massachusetts," Dattoli said.

Massachusetts General Law allows for citizens to present petitions to the Attorney General's Office for a statewide ballot initiative. Once vetted for constitutionality and legal language, the AG then turns the petition back to the citizen.

That's when petitioners hit the streets to gather the 75,000 signatures required by the Secretary of State's Office, which must then certify that the signatures belong to registered voters. Petitioners have 11 weeks, from September to mid-November, to gather, return and certify the signatures.

"Right now, there are 44 petitions floating around Massachusetts," Dattoli said, of the 2025 election cycle. "Only four or five will make it to the ballot."

Dattoli said because it's such a difficult process, it's almost impos lone resident like himself to do it.

Subscribe

"There are actually companies you can hire to get the signatures for you," Dattoli said. "You can get it done easily if you have the money."

In 2023, Dattoli got 5,000 signatures for his petition, which he said "felt like a lot of work."

This time around, he formed a political committee, hoping to raise money and find support. So far, he's raised only $200 and found 1,600 supporters on Facebook to be his boots on the ground.

And he's reached out to city and town committees statewide for support.

"Unfortunately, their reactions have been mixed," Dattoli said. "And people can only focus on a small number of initiatives."

If this petition fails, what happens then?

"What happens is that your petition will expire," Dattoli said. "Because this will become a constitutional amendment, you have to wait another two years to start the process all over again.

"If you think it's easier the second time around, it's not," he added, of the process. "You really need a large group of dedicated volunteers and set up a structure. It's a real beast. There are too many steps involved and I think it's purposefully difficult."

Why he's doing it

When he's out gathering signatures, Dattoli said most people he runs into are very surprised Massachusetts has no recall mechanism.

"I was surprised myself," Dattoli said. "As far as I can tell, no one memory has tried to get something like this passed in Massachusetts. I was

Subscribe

also surprised by the mixed reactions from people."

Dattoli said there's not a large appetite for recall in Massachusetts, considering the overwhelming dominance of one party.

"People are concerned that this will be used as a political tool to remove their enemies," he said, of the reactions he's heard. "But if you look at a state like California, which has had some recalls, it hasn't been too many. I think people would use this responsibly, regardless of the political party."

Dattoli said Massachusetts has had some instances where recall has been used on the local level.

For example, in November 2018, Fall River voters cast ballots in a recall election after their mayor, Jasiel Correia, was arrested that same October and charged with wire fraud and filing false tax returns. The mayor had refused to resign, forcing the city into the recall.

Donate today!

However, there are ongoing cases now where nothing can be done to recall officials accused of wrongdoing. Dattoli pointed to the killing of Sandra Birchmore in 2021, whose death was ruled as asphyxia by investigators from the Norfolk DA's office. Federal investigators had to be brought in and they later determined Birchmore was killed by a Canton police officer.

Recall has a process

The National Conference of State Legislatures estimates the "recall device began in the United States in a municipality — Los Angeles — in 1903."

Subscribe

"Michigan and Oregon, in 1908, were the first states to adopt reca procedures for state officials," the website reads. "Illinois became the most

recent state to adopt recall procedures for state officials when voters approved a constitutional amendment in 2010 to allow recall of the governor. Before that, Minnesota (1996) and New Jersey (1993) were the most recent."

Dattoli said many states are willing to adopt a recall mechanism and add steps along the way that will ensure fairness in the process. For example, some states don't allow recall in the first or last six months of a term and many set a high bar when it comes to the percentage of votes needed to recall someone, about 20% in Wisconsin and 12.5% in California.

"I would say that people would reserve a recall for a serious issue," Dattoli said. "I can't envision a world where you would recall someone like let's say the governor."

But that's not the point. Dattoli wants to give citizens the option.

"For me, it's about accountability," he said. "If you vote to put someone in office and they break your trust, you should have a mechanism to recall them."

What's next?

With less than a month left until ballot initiative signatures are due back to Secretary of State William Galvin's office, Dattoli said he knows he won't make the needed threshold.

But don't count him out. Dattoli plans to file his ballot initiative for a third time in 2027.

Why?

Subscribe

"People don't know there's no recall in this state," he said, of his reasons for staying the course. "Also, this is a way to make an impact on the Legislature through the ballot process. You can make a difference."

Dattoli pointed to a plethora of citizen petitions that have made a difference in Massachusetts, including some of the following: in 1911, allowed voters to use voting machines in elections; in 1948, added the phrase "The right of free speech shall not be abridged" to the state constitution; in 1972, set the minimum voting age as 18; and in 2024, eliminated the MCAS exam as the sole graduation requirement.

Check out Ballotpedia for a list of Massachusetts ballot initiatives starting from 1895 to a firearms regulations referendum set for November 2026.

Dattoli added Massachusetts residents are lucky in that anyone can file a petition to make changes to the state constitution. He hopes his efforts gives others, especially the younger generation, an impetus to become involved in the process.

In the meantime, he's still gathering signatures.

"I have good intentions," Dattoli said, of his continued efforts. "I'm taking action and I'm ruffling some feathers.

For more information on Dattoli's ballot initiative or to get involved in the effort, email MassachusettsRecall@gmail.com.

Nell Escobar Coakley has been a journalist for more than 30 years. She is co-founder and editor-in-chief of Gotta Know Medford and editor of Winchester News. She can be reached at editor@winchesternews.org.

Subscribe

Winchester News is a non-profit organization supported by our community. If you appreciate having local Winchester news, please donate to support our work, and subscribe to our free weekly newsletter. Copyright 2025 Winchester News Group, Inc. Copying and sharing with written permission only.

Related

NEWS

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER
March 4, 2026

NEWS

Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

March 4, 2026

Subscribe

NEWS

Winchester gun owners face new training rules starting April 2

Public safety data How Winchester compares on firearms licenses in comparable Massachusetts communities Active licenses as of Jan. 25, 2025 — Source: Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board License to carry firearms Firearms identification card Winchester and Marblehead are the focus communities. Peers selected based on comparable population size, demographics and suburban

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 4, 2026

NEWS

Sen. Jason Lewis, Mass. Senate strengthen fair housing protections for renters, buyers

The following was submitted by the Office of Sen. Jason Lewis: State Sen. Jason Lewis joined his colleagues in the Massachusetts Senate to pass legislation that protects residents from discrimination in the housing market as the Trump administration abandons its enforcement of the federal Fair Housing Act. Illegal discrimination continues

March 3, 2026

Latest

NEWS

FEATURES

Subscribe

Winchester School Committee candidates bring contrasting backgrounds to Thursday forum

Two candidates for Winchester's School Committee will face voters at a forum as the district navigates a new literacy curriculum, budget pressures and questions about student mental health. Heather von Mering and John Bellaire are competing for an open seat on the School Committee, which oversees a budget von

WILL DOWD | STAFF WRITER

March 4, 2026

'Chicago: Teen Edition' dances onto the Winchester High School stage

By Talia Ho | Correspondent Fame. Fortune. And all that jazz. This spring, Winchester High School presents "Chicago: Teen Edition," a bold musical that explores celebrity culture, media manipulation, and the cost of ambition. Set in the 1920s, this iconic production is sure to leave the audience wanting more. Performances will

SPECIAL TO THE NEWS

March 4, 2026

EVENTS

Ripley Chapel in Winchester presents 'Syldason: You Are Welcome Here'

The following was submitted by the Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church: On Friday, March 13, beginning at 7:30 p.m., live in-person and live streamed from the stunning Ripley Chapel at First Congregational Church, Winchester, 21 Church St., join in with Syldason, a duo concert featuring Sylvie Zakarian,

March 4, 2026

NEWS

Rep. Michael Day helps House colleagues pass sweeping energy affordability bill

The following was submitted by the Office of Rep. Michael S. Day: Rep. Michael S. Day and his colleagues in the House of Representatives recently passed energy affordability legislation that would result in over $9 billion in savings for utility ratepayers over the next 10 years. The bill maintains critical

March 4, 2026

Subscribe

Subscribe to Winchester News

© 2026 Winchester News Group, Inc. Copying and sharing with permission for non-commercial use only.